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# The Challenge: The Newsletter of The Center for Gifted Studies

The Center for Gifted Studies

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# the challenge

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER FOR GIFTED STUDIES ❧ WINTER 2000

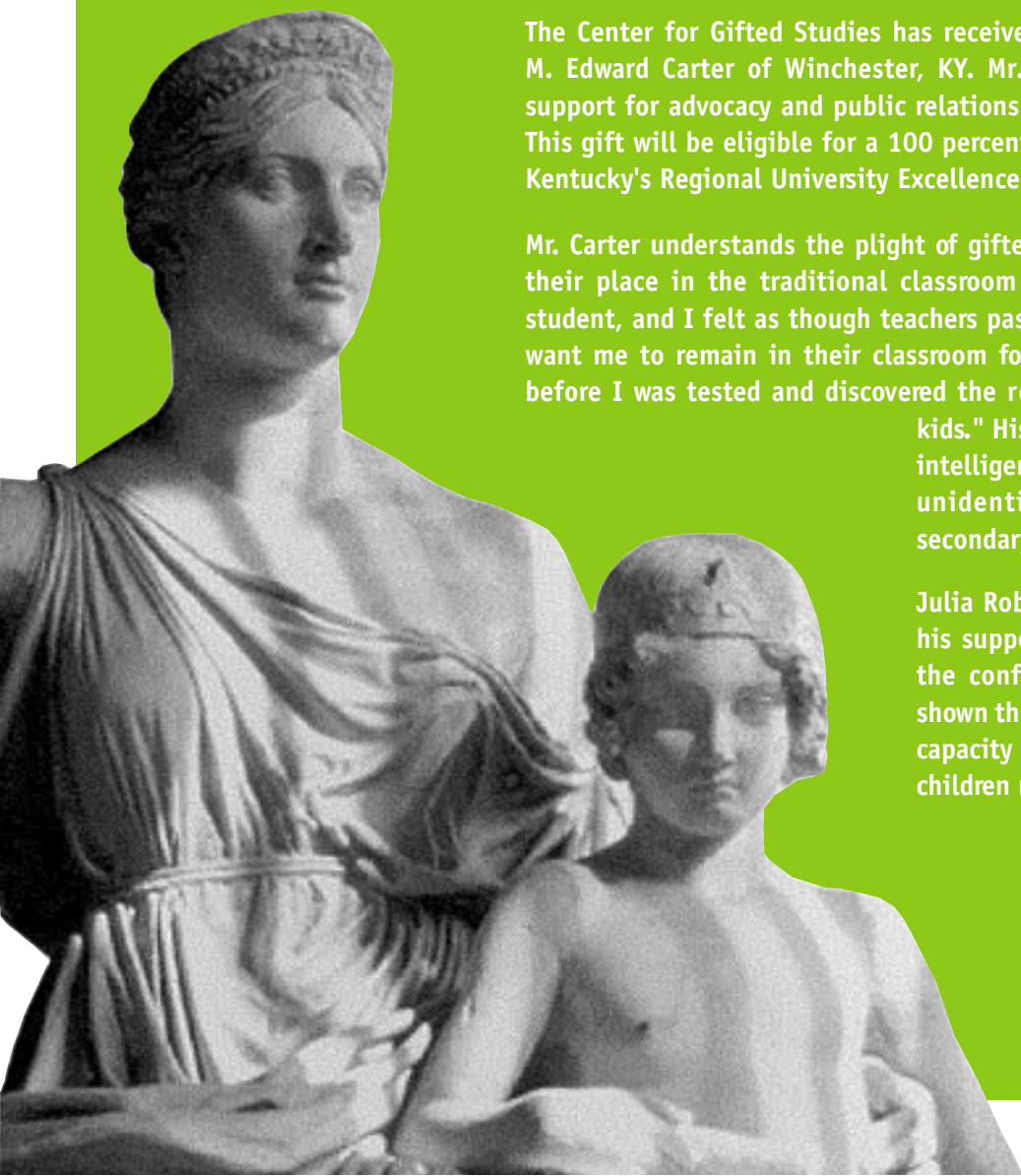
## *A Gift From A Friend*

The Center for Gifted Studies has received a \$50,000.00 commitment from M. Edward Carter of Winchester, KY. Mr. Carter made this gift to provide support for advocacy and public relations for gifted children and The Center. This gift will be eligible for a 100 percent match from the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Regional University Excellence Trust Fund.

Mr. Carter understands the plight of gifted children as they struggle to find their place in the traditional classroom setting: "I was the world's worst student, and I felt as though teachers passed me largely because they didn't want me to remain in their classroom for another year. I was 40 years old before I was tested and discovered the reason I never fit in with the other

kids." His tests showed he had a high level of intelligence, which had gone overlooked and unidentified during his elementary and secondary education.

Julia Roberts said The Center is grateful for his support: "I want to thank Mr. Carter for the confidence in The Center that he has shown through this gift. He has enhanced the capacity of The Center to advocate for gifted children now and in the future."



# Letter from Julia Roberts



DEAR FRIENDS OF THE  
CENTER FOR GIFTED STUDIES,

Let's celebrate excellence! In celebrating excellence we need to add cheers for academic excellence to the cheers for athletic excellence. We need to examine the pathways for becoming world-class athletes and apply that knowledge to nurturing world-class scholars.

What patterns exist for the development of athletic talent? First, starting early is important. Tiger Woods began playing golf at the age of three. Second, athletes who become "stars" work hard de-

veloping their skills by practicing with others who play at similar or more advanced levels. Serena and Venus Williams provide competition for each other. Competition is a vital ingredient in skill improvement. Third, crowds offer approval and encouragement for athletes as they cheer for their football and basketball teams.

Educators must develop academic talents in much the same way that coaches do. We must identify and nurture academic talent to high levels. We must provide opportunities for students to work hard on challenging tasks, raising the bar when students are ready for increasingly challenging learning. We must show our support for academic accomplishments, remembering that feedback is the breakfast of champions.

New records are set in athletics as old records are broken. Recently many athletic feats have gained wide notice. The Olympics focused world attention on excellence in a wide variety of sports. Tiger Woods set a record in golf as did the Williams sisters in tennis. The Yankees won the World Series for the third consecutive year, and the city celebrated. Young people can set new records in academics if they are provided with opportunities to learn at high levels, levels that present no learning ceiling.

SINCERELY,

JULIA ROBERTS

## The Mission for The Center

*We are committed to encouraging excellence by providing educational opportunities and resources to three populations: gifted and talented students, educators working with gifted students, and parents of gifted students.*

## The Vision for The Center

*Becoming an internationally preeminent center is the vision of The Center for Gifted Studies. This vision includes expanding services in five areas: (1) offering educational programs for gifted children and youth, (2) providing professional development opportunities for educators, (3) enhancing communication and advocacy for gifted children, (4) conducting research and developing curriculum to remove the learning ceiling, and (5) building a testing and counseling component for gifted children and their families.*

# the challenge

Editor  
TRACY INMAN

Designer  
MARCUS DUKES

## ***A Challenge for Kentucky's Brightest: The Kentucky Academy for Mathematics and Science***

Kentuckians are on the brink of an opportunity that will literally change the lives of some of our gifted and talented young people. Academic challenge for the profoundly gifted is rare in our state — especially for those from rural areas or disadvantaged backgrounds. Meeting the social-emotional needs of these students is even more rare. Our top students find themselves leaving the state searching for an answer. But hopefully that is changing.

The Kentucky Legislature designated \$500,000 planning monies in the 2000-2002 budget for the Kentucky Academy for Mathematics and Science. The Academy will offer a residential early admissions college program for our bright, highly motivated high school students who have demonstrated interest in pursuing careers in science and mathematics. Dr. Julia Roberts and Dr. Charles McGruder, the writers of the proposal for the Academy, will use that money to plan for the Academy.

The Academy will definitely meet the academic and social-emotional needs of Kentucky's brightest in the future. But it is too late for Bowling Green, KY, native Jenny Buck.

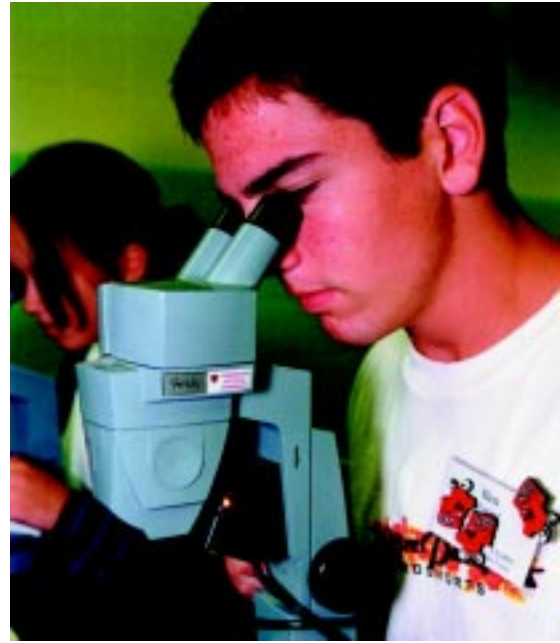


PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

# students

Jenny was forced to look outside the state for her answer — a difficult and expensive alternative. Her early educational career reads like a tragic novel with academic stumbling blocks, peers who couldn't relate, and unchallenging curriculum. She even recalls an elementary teacher reprimanding her with "You know too many words" and "You can't possibly understand this" (referring to her reading Strickberger's *Genetics*.) Not only was school incredibly tedious and boring for her, but she also felt like an outcast.

Then in the summer of 1997, she came to VAMPY and enrolled in Dr. Linda Walker's Genetics class. It greatly changed her perspective: "Coming to VAMPY gave me a glimpse of what things could be like if I were allowed to explore challenging material and be surrounded by other students who had a drive to learn. This was something I had never encountered before. Students were in the classroom not because it was required, but because they wanted to be. Students were interested in the material and were not causing problems and disrupting class, but they were asking questions about the subject at hand. And the teacher truly enjoyed the subject matter being presented and was enthusiastic about the students asking questions." This gave her a "renewed sense of hope and determination that had almost

been lost during years of isolation in the public schools." Her school life would change — but she would have to leave Kentucky to change it.

Jenny found her answer in a small private women's college in Virginia: Mary Baldwin College where high school students take classes with traditional college students but have separate residential living areas. And it made a remarkable difference: "Mary Baldwin was a different world. For the first time I could choose all my own classes and be challenged, as well as interact with normal college students as an equal — and meet a small number of students from around the world who shared similar experiences with me." Within two years, however, Jenny ran out of challenging Biology classes. With the help of her Mary Baldwin advisor, she transferred to the University of Virginia and loves it: "It offers an atmosphere of excellence, and the opportunity to be surrounded with a large number of students who are not only the best, but have a strong desire to succeed in whatever they do." That description sounds much like the goals of the Academy.

The Kentucky Academy of Mathematics and Science will change lives. It will offer an environment where exceptional high school students can be themselves — and be



accepted and treasured for that. Just as Jenny found that environment at Mary Baldwin ("I found a group of friends that I could relate to and who did not judge me for my age alone"), so will others find it in their home state. In fact, Jenny has high hopes for the Academy: "The Academy enables students who were in my position to have another option rather than moving so far away from their parents, and it gives them a chance to learn at their own pace.... I think the Academy is a wonderful and much needed program for students across the state of Kentucky." The Center for Gifted Studies, Western Kentucky University, and the Kentucky Legislature couldn't agree more.



...What I found funny was the number of remarks we received about how well we got along and that we seemed to like each other more than most siblings. Usually we fight as much as most people would expect of siblings, but I think we were both very happy to be there and happy to be around one another: camp love...." Ted agrees: "We were together quite a bit more, and I enjoyed it. After we got back though, Carrie and I didn't get to see quite as much of each other as we had at camp, and I missed it some." These siblings from Michigan shared late night talks and even made a movie for Ted's final project in his Humanities class. Their VAMPY time drew them even closer.

Already close friends as well as siblings, Rachel and Joel Veitschegger of Bowling Green, KY, found that VAMPY re-confirmed their friendship. A five-year veteran of the camps and a two-year counselor, Joel had been eager for his brother and sister to share his experiences. His brother Adam is already a VAMPY alumnus; it was Rachel who shared her first VAMPY this year with Joel. Joel explains: "I have had a really good relationship with Rachel for a few years, and camp really helped to strengthen that. VAMPY has always been an important part of my life and getting to share that with her meant a lot. Now she knows where I'm coming from." Rachel also enjoyed the experience. She was excited at the prospect of their being together and relished the fact they sang in the talent show and danced at the

*"It's always fun to meet first-year first-years, kids just out of 7th grade who have never been to VAMPY before. This sounds corny, but it's touching, as a 'veteran,' watching them come and blossom from shy, unsure nerds of middle school into interesting, thoughtful individuals. You remember what it was like when you were in their shoes. I knew VAMPY would be a great experience for my brother, and I looked forward to sharing it with him."*

**CHRISTIN HARTUNG**  
Owensboro, KY

## ***It's All in the Family***

Although we haven't yet had generations come through our programs, we often do see many members of the same families. We've serviced two, three, even four siblings through our Super Saturdays, SCATS, and VAMPY programs. This year in VAMPY alone we had seven sets of siblings! Their insight into sharing their camp experience with a brother or a sister may prove surprising.

The Matherly children, Carrie and Ted, thoroughly enjoyed their togetherness. Nineteen-year-old Carrie worked as a counselor this year (she's a four-year veteran of VAMPY.) Her sixteen-year-old brother finished his sixth year with us — two years in SCATS and four in VAMPY. At first, though, Ted had reservations: "I was a bit nervous because I thought my sister would be very uptight and responsible, and that I would be answering to her quite a bit." That wasn't the case at all. In fact, Carrie explains: "It was really great to have Ted there this year. We got along so well, and it made me feel even more like I was returning 'home.'"

dances. One of Joel's favorite memories surrounds a time that he was able to comfort his tearful little sister: "We talked about it, and it just showed me more how special she is and how she really is different from other people." By sharing experiences such as VAMPY, their relationship will continue growing.

Jon Whitney of Georgetown, KY, had been expecting his little sister, Jean, to join him at VAMPY: "My sister just became old enough to go, and I was almost positive she would make it. Still, it was strange because I had to watch what I said and what my friends said around her because she's so much younger." Jean was thrilled that her first year overlapped with his last: "I think it was a lot nicer to have him there — he knew everyone. He helped me make a lot of friends. The first few days everyone called me 'Jon Whitney's little sister.'" Apparently that has happened throughout her life as Jon comments: "Jean has often complained that everywhere she goes she is branded as 'Jon's little sister.' One of the big things about being a younger sibling is having others go before you, and other people expect certain things from you depending on what your siblings were like." This

# thank you

Thank you for being there,  
The face I do not know.  
Thank you for being there;  
You will help me grow.

Like a light through the darkness,  
Your kind heart has shone through.  
In your compassion and unselfishness,  
I am inspired by you.

I do not know all the reasons why.  
I can only find one cause:  
Your generous heart has shone through,  
And this deserves applause.

Unlike the boastful,  
You seek no recognition.  
You leave me so joyful  
At my new found position -

A position of opportunity.  
You have opened this door -  
Greater knowledge, more maturity.  
Wish I could give you more.

You show what kind of person you are  
With this noble, humble act.  
All I can do for you now  
is give you this simple pact:  
I will strive for excellence;  
I will prevail;  
I will stand tall and mighty against  
this world's constant assail.  
May God watch over you,  
And His blessings be abundantly bestowed.

*Prepared for the face I do not know  
by Paul Davis — May 17, 2000*

*This was written after Paul received  
a scholarship to attend SCATS.*

time, she didn't quite mind that name so much. In fact, she enjoyed having Jon with her: "He was always there. I walk down the hall: 'Hi Jon.' I'm in the ice cream line: 'Hi Jon.' It was cool." They both look back on their practicing and performing *VAMPY Pie* in the talent show as one of the highlights of their time together.

"Having attended VAMPY for four years straight, I of course had to have SOMEONE to show the ropes to. Someone young, someone new, preferably a captive audience... Hey! I have a little brother!" jokes Owensboro veteran Christin Hartung. Her little brother, John, fully anticipated their joint camping: "Christin had gone to VAMPY three years in a row, and she was fully planning on making my first year her fourth." Their VAMPY experience brought them closer together Christin feels: "We had a lot more to talk about after VAMPY. We'd never been as close as many siblings are, but VAMPY gave us a common bond, something to talk about. It became a giant three-week inside joke, to be kept from Mom and Dad." These siblings certainly developed a stronger bond.

We've found that most of our participants, whether they be from SCATS, VAMPY, or Super Saturdays, eagerly wish to share their experiences with their families. Like Christin and Jon, being campers at the same time is ultimate sharing. For even older siblings like Carrie and Adam, counselor and camper create a fine pairing. When siblings do have the chance to be at Western at the same time, their relationships strengthen and grow. Throw in the challenging academics, and it's a winning combination.

## ***Clowning = Confidence***

Whoever imagined that a red rubber nose, balloon animals, and juggling could transform a shy young man into an outgoing, self-confident eleven-year-old entrepreneur? Nick Wilkins of Bowling Green, KY, imagined – and made it a reality. His Super Saturdays and SCATS Clowning classes were intentionally designed for just that purpose. The Ringling Brothers-trained clown explains: "The program itself exclaims what it's all about. 1) I want to instill confidence, bring kids out of their shells, and 2) I want to present a positive attitude. For example, one rule of the class is there is no use of the word *can't* as far as learning to juggle or do tricks. This carries over into other aspects of their lives. It is a big part of who they are especially at this age." It is just this philosophy that changed D.J. Duvall's life.

D.J., now a sixth grader at Edmonson County Middle School, took Nick's Super Saturdays' class two years ago. He had known Nick – Broadway the Clown – through the clown's performance at his father's food shows. And he was intrigued. He signed up for the class; by the second day he was hooked: "We watched a video when Nick was in the circus juggling. I knew then that I wanted to do that someday." But how does a bashful child, one (according to his mother Lisa) whose "social graces weren't as far along as they should've been" get up in front of people and perform? He accomplished this through determination, practice — and an encouraging mentor.





Lisa Duvall explains, "Nick took an interest in him. He's a wonderful, wonderful man. My child thinks he's IT." Through Nick's tutelage, D.J. was off to a terrific start. After the class, D.J. continued on his own: he bought a unicycle and practiced and practiced and practiced. He invested in tricks and received them for gifts. He even got a dove for his birthday! And Nick was with him the whole way encouraging, supplying literature, even helping him get real jobs.

D.J.'s first clowning job was at his school where he taught a class of his own focusing on balloon animals and juggling. He worked the Back to School Bash in his county, unicycle and all. Then this past summer he actually received pay for his clowning! He performed for 75 children at his local public library's Summer Reading Program. He explains his reactions: "I kind of got stage fright. I was real nervous — but they loved it!" He then went on to other jobs — paying jobs.

Nick thrills in D.J.'s passion and his success: "He was a bright star in the group. He stayed with it; he's quite persistent. It's been an inspiration to me." So that inspiration works both ways.

"He's completely different," his mother marvels. "Now he's a ham. It's almost embarrassing! But really he's bloomed into a little gentleman. Now he doesn't care to stand up and introduce himself: 'Hi, I'm D.J. Duvall.'" She believes his biggest achievement came this past school year during the talent show. She explained that with his makeup on, he became a confident young man. But during this show, he performed without his makeup: "it was a big step for him."

D.J. reflects on his growth as well: "Before I started, you couldn't have gotten me out in front of people. When I have my makeup on now, no one knows it's me. So I can do anything. But now, I would do anything without makeup that I would do with it." That's confidence. That's maturity. That's what the Clowning class is all about.

What does the future hold for D.J.? Of course, he's going to keep clowning. And all he wants for Christmas involves clowning. But one day, he wants to be a Patch Adams: "I want to be a doctor and a clown on the side." As for Broadway the Clown, he'll still be with The Center: "I've been fortunate to be a part of it. I look forward to many years." We look forward to that as well. Who knows how many more young people will be touched forever by his classes?

## ***SCATS: Let the Campers Speak for Themselves***

For the past eighteen years, The Center for Gifted Studies has provided a two-week summer camp for high-ability young people called the Summer Camp for Academically Talented Middle School Students. The camp provides a diverse curriculum and a wide range of enrichment experiences for 170 residential students and 50 non-residential ones. This year The Writers' Workshop was offered for the first time, a half-day seminar taught by two veteran writing teachers, Nancy Schulten and Sonya Bruce. What follows are excerpts from the students' writings done for a SCATS newspaper. What better way to describe SCATS!

## **Western Offers a Beneficial Yet Enjoyable Summer Camp**

... Academically gifted and talented students gather here to learn, grow, and acquire various relationships on the campus of Western Kentucky University. The two-week camp allows junior high students to take four of several classes from clowning to scientific investigations, even digital camera workshop/video production. Students board in a dormitory with a roommate as they experience the college lifestyle. Not only do the campers learn new skills and face new challenges in their studies, they also learn to socialize and develop their communication and personal skills. Activities fill the nights and weekends without a trace of homesickness.

... Campers of SCATS are now experiencing a taste of independence by living on their own during the two-week period of SCATS camp. Dorming on the WKU campus in Bemis-Lawrence Hall is quite different from home. No walk-in closets, no personal showers, and no personal bathrooms are found here, but you have a roommate to live with. There are many advantages to living in dorms, like making new friends and attending floor parties. The dorming is half the fun because whether it is 'chillin' in the lobby, playing a sport, or doing the chicken dance with friends in the hall, everyone has a blast in the dorm!

... There are plenty of optional activities to fill up the week nights. The optional activities range from all sorts of things, like basketball, volleyball, dodge ball, swimming, Ultimate Frisbee, and many others. There is also a field trip off campus each session of SCATS. This year it was to Lost River Cave, a famous spot in Bowling Green, Kentucky. There are other annual events the camp has to offer, like Paper Theater where students are given an altered fairy tale and have to make costumes out of newspaper. There is also a cookout held on the Sunday of each session of SCATS. And last but not least, the talent show....

As you can see, through new connections, ideas, challenges, and activities, students return home with a sense of confidence and support after being with students ... like themselves. SCATS is truly a masterpiece in summer camp fun.

*Written by Whitney Camp, Natalie Winkler, Grant England, Danny Pietrusinski, and Patrick Birmingham*

## **New E-Mail Address**

In our effort to help you, we have simplified our e-mail address. Our new address omits the word *studies* to make it shorter and easier to remember: [gifted@wku.edu](mailto:gifted@wku.edu). Right now, you may reach us at either address. Our old address [gifted.studies@wku.edu](mailto:gifted.studies@wku.edu) will stop working in March of 2001.



## Writers' Camp Isn't Just Writing: Students Experience New Discoveries

For those campers who didn't take The Young Writers' Camp, they might describe this class as being a lot of writing, where people sit around for three hours in one place. However, students who chose this class have a much different perspective. It is true that there is a lot of writing, but that is only the beginning.

One thing that is done is that there are many hands-on activities. For a 'snapshot' activity, campers were taken outside and told to describe their surroundings. This could have been a bird, tree, spider web, or just the atmosphere itself. In another incident, campers were given picture advertisements cut out of magazines to write a more in-depth snapshot.... On sunny days, students were allowed to go outside to write, then come back inside and share their progress with their class. Any way you look at it, the students take part in class instead of consistently staring at a piece of blank paper.

... It isn't only the teachers that have been a positive influence but the fellow students as well. For the reason that everyone in this class is a talented writer, the class is able to move at a faster pace. Although the teachers give students a different perspective in writing, the students are successful as teachers as well....

... Looking back at the past week alone, it seems that all of the students have grown to be stronger writers, even in this short period of time. The Writers' Camp has had an impact on many minds as they discovered new methods, ideas and friendships in this class.

*Written by Megan Pickerel*

### Paper Theater

... The campers at SCATS at Western Kentucky University did paper theater on June 24, 2000. In paper theater, campers were split up into eight different groups. Each group was given a well-known fairy tale to perform. Not real tricky, huh? Well, the catch is that each group's fairy tale had a certain twist to it to make it more difficult. Also, all of the groups' props and clothes for the skit had to be made from paper. They were given 30 minutes to make the costumes and get the story ready.

Examples of these stories and twists are the ones actually performed. They were 'Little Red Riding Hood' valley girl style, 'Snow White' talk show style, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' opera style, 'The Princess and the Pea' ghetto style, 'Rumpelstiltskin' fast forward style, 'The Three Little Pigs' MTV style, 'Cinderella' SCATS style, and 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf' wrestling style.

Wherever you looked, you saw other campers dressed in paper dresses, mini-skirts, and shirts. All of the stories were very entertaining and most were very humorous.... Anyway, that is only a small piece of what has been happening here at SCATS.

*Written by Elizabeth Hall*

So composes some of SCATS Writers' Workshop participants. As captured here in their own words, SCATS indeed affords a rare opportunity for gifted and talented middle school students – that is an opportunity to enrich their lives both academically and socially with others like themselves.



## Physics Teacher Doug Jenkins: Sixteen-Year VAMPY Veteran

"Physics ROCKS!" enthuses engineer Wake Norris of San Jose, CA. "As an engineer today, I can trace many of my interests back to my course and social experiences while a camper at The Center. Physics was yet another link in my future chain. It brought the core science to the forefront and allowed me to lay the necessary foundation for both understanding the more complex sciences and understanding the basic actions/reactions that happen all around us every day of our lives." Wake, along with sixteen years of Physics VAMPY campers, has Doug Jenkins to thank for laying that strong foundation — and for having a great time while doing it!

Doug Jenkins, affectionately known as Dr. J, does indeed equate learning with "thrills, highs, and a 'rush.'" In fact he explains, "I give up three weeks of my summer each year because I like being in on the 'fun' of learning where the students appreciate what we do." And appreciate they do. Wake, an eight-year veteran of The Center, remembers: "Dr. J made physics visual. An abstract theory became a dancing laser light, a swinging bowling ball, or a three-legged dog. He brought things to life that had no life. Each class was a joy to attend." Part of that joy resulted from the philosophy behind it.

Doug explains that his VAMPY class differs greatly from his approach at Warren Central High School in Bowling Green, KY: "Unlike the regular setting, this is meant to be a 'here it is — grab all you can; now let's open the next present.' In regular school, we would do more homework and activities to ensure that all students had a real good opportunity to grasp it all. With this group, they all absorb a lot and are ready to get on with it. It is not meant to replace their high school class but rather introduce them, tie it in with other concepts and disciplines, and give them a background. We hope to excite them about Physics." According to Wake, he's done just that.

*(Continued on page 11)*

*Dr. Dick Roberts is rather surprising. Mention him across the state to teacher educators or interns or even the Kentucky State Department of Education, and they would be astounded to know he did anything else besides coordinating the statewide teacher intern program or challenging teachers in graduate school. Likewise, say his name to participants or teachers in any of our programs, and they would automatically link him to The Center. They'd scoff at the suggestion he had time for anything else. Surprisingly, he does it all – one as his profession, the other as his passion.*

## Spotlight: Dr. Dick Roberts



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

Another surprising aspect concerning "Dr. Richard" (as so many children lovingly call him) is the fact he gets paid nothing for his countless hours of work for The Center – and he doesn't mind it at all. When asked why he spends the long hours organizing speakers, picking up VAMPY kids from the airport, cooking countless hamburgers for the midnight cookout, or lugging boxes of books around for AP consultants, he simply answers, "Because it's fun – and it's necessary. Hours are just a part of it. There's a job that needs to be done." But actually, it's much more than just a job to be done for Dr. Richard – it's all about caring, about genuine concern for others, about making life rewarding for others. It's intrinsic to him; it's his passion. It's all about kids, the thousands of gifted and

talented young people who have crossed through our doors, not to mention the thousands of others who are rewarded with better teachers due to our programs. No, he is not a specialist in gifted education; no, he doesn't have an "official" title at The Center. But he does have his heart (and his sweat and even his tears) vested in The Center. And without him, things wouldn't be possible.

His brother, a lawyer, once commented to Dick that he was envious of Dick's position (that same brother is now a judge.) Once a person earns money for the hours he works, the two are inextricably mixed; either he works countless hours meticulously marking every dollar earned or he decides he has enough money and

quits working his job regardless of the impact he makes on society. The intrinsic value of a job well-done and the ownership a person feels for his environment soon die away. Dick continues, "I feel sorry for people who get paid for everything they do. They miss out on the other values. They miss out on the kids. Miss the Jenny Bucks (see article *A Challenge for Kentucky's Brightest*.)" He's missed very little in his lifetime, thanks to his open heart and indefatigable spirit.

When asked his greatest challenge, he sighs, "Getting it all done." But then he pauses and honestly voices, "Kids." That voice breaks as he stops to control himself, whispering the name of a young girl who went through an impossible tragedy while at camp – the death of an only parent – and then he describes the horrific world she came from: one of abuse, neglect, and shame. His role in helping her escape was heroic at the least, although he doesn't view it that way. It was something that simply needed to be done. Marveling, he goes on to describe the positive impact The Center has on so many children: "It's amazing how one two-week period eight years later can still be so important to a person. It stuns me at times. We always associate VAMPY

*In 2000, Dick Roberts co-wrote a chapter with Julia Roberts for a text edited by Frances Karnes and Suzanne Bean. The chapter "Writing Units That Remove the Learning Ceiling" is in Prufrock Press's Methods and Materials for Teaching the Gifted.*



with the great emotion and deep connections. I'm caught up short by the comments SCATS kids make as young adults, unsolicited comments. It is amazing. And it's kind of sad – that life is not that way for them. They say how it's the best two weeks of their lives, but I know how they sat at the side and looked in. At least I can say "Thank God they felt good about being here." He takes comfort in the foundation that The Center has established: "You don't have to be anything other than what you are." Although it's hard to establish and even harder to maintain, he believes that The Center provides answers: "That's what they need – is a place where they only have to be." Dr. Richard, along with his wife Julia, are responsible for this. One can now see why he feels such ownership, why he is so passionate, why money isn't even a consideration.

Competing with his passion, or perhaps complimenting it, is his profession. Reflectively, Dick sums up his career in one word: serendipitous. As he outlines his professional history, he frequently talks of serendipity, how circumstances seem to guide his path. But when he comes to The Center he clarifies: "The greatest planned activity has been The Center. Serendipity only gets you so far. We had to have vision." And he reasserts how this vision came forth: "Education prepares you to take advantage of opportunities." His educational foundation was strong; his opportunities were abundant; and his courage to take advantage of those opportunities fierce.

His story begins as a biology teacher in Kansas City, MO, who worked with slower learners. Piloting an "Academically Unsuccessful Students" program, he found the work rewarding. And today he parallels their plight to that of the gifted: "Kids suffered in a system that had no space for them, had low tolerance for them. Many were angry." Perhaps the first serendipitous occurrence happened when he gave a presentation in Oklahoma outlining his pilot program. A graduate professor in the

crowd approached him about doing graduate work. Next thing the Roberts knew they sold their brand-new house and moved to Oklahoma. Both began work on their doctorates, he a year earlier than she. There he taught freshman Biology and Elementary Science Methods. Four years later, they earned their doctorates. A university policy prohibited hiring graduates, so they found themselves in Gary Indiana at the IU campus — with their brand new baby, Stacy.



Meanwhile, another serendipitous circumstance was in the making. While they were in Gary, Dick's major professor from Oklahoma had gone to Texas to the University of Houston. Soon, he offered Dick a job. The opportunity was presented and welcomed. Here he became involved in Competency Based Teacher Education. The Dean had gathered the most respected people in that area to work at the university. Dick refers to those three years as "Camelot." He was quickly promoted to Associate Professor while Julia worked as a Program Specialist. It was here their second daughter, Julie, was born.

A good friend of his there received a flyer in the mail one day from some university in a town he'd never heard of in Kentucky. His wife refused to even consider a move, so he put Dick's name on it. And yes, they soon made an unplanned move

to Kentucky – Bowling Green, KY. He was hired to work with Competency Based Teacher Education and Science Methods here at Western Kentucky University. Julia came unemployed with a newborn and a two-year old. Soon though she got involved with Teacher Corps. From there, she created a job for herself that filled a desperate need no one else was doing – gifted education. She designed the courses for the endorsement. Part of the endorsement is a practicum wherein teachers work with gifted students. Thus SCATS was born, and VAMPY soon followed. The rest is history.

Soon Dick began dividing time (or somehow creating more time in a 24 hour day) in order to satisfy his professional obligations and his passion for The Center. By 1985, he became the coordinator of the Kentucky Internship Program for beginning teachers, taking over for Roger Pankratz who initiated it – another serendipitous opportunity seized. With the reform in 1990, he was instrumental in creating an innovative Internship Program that incorporated the New Teacher Standards. For the last six years, he plus a person from the University of Kentucky and one from Eastern Kentucky University have spearheaded the internship program for the entire state. This not only involves designing the program and training the cooperating teachers, but also pairing every new teacher in the state with a cooperating teacher. That job alone could fill an entire day every day of the week. Include the two education classes he teaches each semester, and his schedule can be overwhelming indeed.

Considering the demands of his career, he could easily sit back and let The Center go on around him without him. But that wouldn't be Dick. After all if there are filing cabinets to move or a doctor's run for a sick camper, he's there. Because remember, "hours are just a part of it. There's a job that needs to be done." So he does that job with dedication, with passion – because that's what it is for him. His passion.



## DOUG JENKINS

(Continued from page 8)

"Memorization was not emphasized — problem solving and deduction were," explains Wake. "As Dr. J often jokingly said, 'The objective of this class is to learn as little as possible.' And we did! You don't have to memorize the formula for acceleration if you know that acceleration is a change in velocity in time, and you don't have to memorize the formula for velocity if you know it's distance covered in time. Essentially, if you learn some basic principles in physics, countless others can be derived from that small piece of knowledge." This common sense approach has made Physics one of the most popular courses in VAMPY.

This three-week summer class covers three-fourths of a year of high school physics! Doug argues, "It is fast paced, challenging, with no going back or review." The class day itself is composed of one-and-a-half hours of lecture and



***"I think that VAMPY kids learn how to use their intellectual gifts to not only their advantage, but to the advantage of their community; experience all the positive aspects of being gifted; learn how valuable good relationships are; and find out that learning can provide thrills, highs, and a 'rush' that is more exciting, more permanent, and longer lasting than any extra-curricular activity."***

## DOUG JENKINS

**VAMPY Physics Instructor**

demonstrations followed by one-and-a-half hours of lab/activity period where the students immediately apply the material covered in the previous session. After lunch the same format is followed. This schedule encourages extensive hands-on learning.

The instructor's rich background as a physicist benefits his classes greatly. From 1968-1973, he worked as a physicist with the United States Army Night Vision Laboratory the entire length of the night vision goggle development program. Then he helped manage a plant that manufactured electrolytic capacitors. Practical scientific application paved the way for his teaching. He returned to Western Kentucky University for his teaching certificate and Master's degree, and since 1976 the educational world has been grateful! Doug was the first recipient of the Presidential Award of Excellence in Science Teaching. He has been awarded the Tandy Technology Scholar Award on a national level as well as been named The Kentucky Academy of Science's Outstanding High School Science Teacher. His gifts and talents are abundantly clear from the list of awards to the enthusiastic response of his students.

The Center is definitely pleased having Doug a part of our team. And we hope to continue that relationship for at least sixteen more years!

## Acceleration: A Viable Answer

The scenario can be all too familiar for a gifted child. She whizzes through the math problems, drags out her latest for-fun book and digs in while waiting for the others to finish. Or he may sneak out the colored pencils to liven up the doodles he's graffitied throughout his notes (or instead of notes) for a subject rudimentarily covered in lecture that he's studied on his own for years. Then again, she may start

talking to the child next to her after she quickly completes her workbook – then be reprimanded by the teacher. Perhaps, he's bored sitting in one place for so long after his work is finished, so he breaks the rules by leaving his seat without permission. Or even worse, she comes home crying or angry or depressed daily due to boredom and frustration. Unfortunately, this is too real for too many high ability young people.

Maybe the child is fortunate enough to have a teacher with a background in gifted and talented. Maybe she routinely gives pretests to assess what her students already know and then differentiates her curriculum based on her findings. Perhaps the child's teacher compacts his curriculum providing enrichment opportunities. Or it could be that the student works eagerly on his independent study co-designed with his teacher. The lucky first grader may go to a fourth grade class for reading and a second grade class for math. So many service options exist that lift the learning ceiling for children (see *The Language of Acceleration* box.) All of these examples can and do work for thousands of children every school day. But sometimes more is needed: grade acceleration.

Two key ingredients spell success for grade acceleration or grade skipping: 1) the child wants it, and 2) the incoming teacher wants it. Research also shows that intellectual pairings are more important than age pairings. In fact, grade acceleration is the only solution for some gifted children.

What follows are five students' stories (all VAMPY and/or SCATS alumni) that describe their accelerations. They highlight the pros and cons of their own experiences and describe what prompted the move to skip a grade.

**Lauren Sneed** (VAMPY 2000) of Columbia, TN, now a sophomore in high school, skipped her eighth grade year. She explains: "I wasn't happy during seventh grade at all. I felt my classes and 'peers' were not challenging enough for me. I could always deal with my social situation as long as I could pay attention to something. Without learning anything, school was only a place for people to ostracize me. I decided getting away from it was a good idea, so I chose to go straight from seventh to ninth." She found many positives with the transition: "I made many new friends and began to have an interest in things again. The courses were somewhat challenging. I was getting slightly depressed, and the new environment helped me more than anything else could have.... My grades would've started slipping from complete lack of effort had they not been able to catch my interest." The grade acceleration was overall positive for Lauren, but it had its drawbacks: "I didn't skip within a school or a situation where I knew everything. Going to high school is, for most, intimidating, and I made the transition knowing no one. Being involved in band and other extracurricular activities helped me to get to know people, and I eased in within the first month or so." Her school is highly supportive of providing a myriad of services for the gifted, but grade skipping isn't one they seem to promote too often because "of the paperwork and the money for level testing that are involved." Fortunately for Lauren, they made an exception in this instance.

Parents often are the first to seek grade acceleration. Such was the case for **Robyn Hasty** (VAMPY 1999 and 2000) of Palm Beach Gardens, FL: "My mother was the one who insisted that I skip kindergarten. She had noticed that I was extremely bored and disinterested in school. She also noticed that the subject matter was much below the capabilities that I had already shown." Robyn attended a private school and encountered several stumbling blocks, including the dismissal of test results by a private psychologist and a



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

## The Language of Acceleration

Don't be confused by the language used to explain acceleration options. The possibilities are tremendous. If parents, educators, administrators, and students all work together, the learning ceiling can be lifted making all things possible.

List adapted from W. T. Southern and E. D. Jones (Eds.) *The Academic Acceleration of Gifted Children*. (1991). New York: Teacher's College Press.

**EARLY ENTRANCE** (K or 1st grade) - Student admitted to school younger than district policy

**GRADE SKIPPING** - Promoting ahead of normal grade placement

**CONTINUOUS PROGRESS** - Curriculum moves ahead as student becomes ready

**SELF-PACED INSTRUCTION** - Student self-selects appropriate material determining own pace

**SUBJECT-MATTER ACCELERATION** - Student is assigned specific subject areas according to abilities without being assigned to a higher grade level

**COMBINED CLASSES** - Student is placed in a class where two or more grade levels are combined

**CURRICULUM COMPACTING** - Introductory curriculum is reduced leaving time for more advanced curriculum and fast paced movement through material

**TELESCOPING CURRICULUM** - Student spends less time in a subject advancing quickly (e.g., doing three years in two)

**MENTORSHIPS** - Student has a one-to-one relationship with someone who provides advanced training and experiences in a content area

**EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMS** - Course work or summer programs that provide advanced instruction and/or credit for study upon completion

**CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT** - Taking course work at two different levels and receiving credit for both (e.g., taking 10th grade algebra and 6th grade math)

**ADVANCED PLACEMENT** - Course work content that can be tested upon completion for college credit

**CREDIT BY EXAMINATION** - Student takes an examination to determine course credit (high school or college credit)

**CORRESPONDENCE** - High school or college courses by mail, television, or Internet

**EARLY ENTRANCE TO JR. HIGH, HIGH SCHOOL, OR COLLEGE** - Student admitted with full standing to an advanced level of instruction at least one year early



re-taking of the same tests (with the same results.) Eventually, they switched to another private school where Robyn entered as a first grader. Robyn remembers learning Tae Kwon Do and Japanese at this new school. Due to her young age, she didn't realize what was fully happening: "To a small child, being told that you're skipping kindergarten is just words. You don't really see the significance until later, when people begin to ask why you're so young and are surprised because they thought you were several years older." Looking back, it made quite a difference in her education: "It's ludicrous to hold a child back when she would gain from a higher level course. The object of school ... is to offer the maximum education. But often times schools overlook a child's ability and blame misbehavior on incompetence instead of boredom." Although the benefits have waned some now that she is a sophomore in high school, the skipping of kindergarten got her on the right track – a challenging one where learning restrictions were lifted.

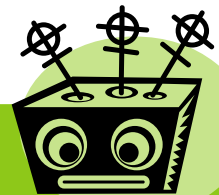
Parents also initiated the skipping of grade four for **Mary Maitland Lederer** (SCATS 1996; VAMPY 1997), currently a sophomore at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her family had moved from Houston to Louisville and soon discovered a repeat of curriculum. After giving her some tests, the school determined that Maitland could indeed be accelerated. It worked beautifully as she remembers: "I thought it was pretty cool. I felt special. The educational advantage was that I was learning things that I didn't already know. Remaining in the fourth grade would not have been useful to me at all." But social challenges existed for her as well: "Socially, I had great difficulties fitting in with the students a year ahead of me. Part of this was because I was more immature. Part of this was because it was junior high." Although she is highly supportive now of her move, she still regrets the social toll it took on her. A move from one state to another coupled with an acceleration perhaps were too many factors at once.

For many though, social situations and relationships improve with grade acceleration because the students are intellectual peers. Often times the accelerated child befriends older people even before the acceleration. Such was the case with **Emily Wright** (SCATS 1997 and 1998; VAMPY 1999 and 2000) of Smyrna, TN: "Skipping the seventh grade gave me the challenge I needed and kept me in my usual

social group. Most of my friends were older than me, so skipping a grade put me in the same class as them." For her elementary years, Emily was a grade level ahead in reading. She along with a large group of her class went to a higher grade for that subject. In her intermediate years, she actually took a bus to the middle school for her math classes. When her gifted facilitator suggested the much needed grade acceleration, Emily decided to do it. And she never regretted the decision: "I was able to move at a quicker pace than I had been which actually improved my grades. I was no longer completely bored in class, and I could expand my knowledge of previously 'watered down' subjects. There was added pressure to excel in the accelerated grade level." The transition worked beautifully for Emily thanks to an accommodating school system, a gifted facilitator with foresight, and her own desire to achieve.

**Michael Kaye**, a ninth grader from Boca Raton, FL, paved the way for others in his school by being the first to skip grades. Many services provided him continuous learning; for example, subject acceleration as a first grader allowed him to go to third grade math. By his second grade year, he had already completed the work, so grade acceleration naturally proved necessary. The move worked well for him as he relates: "What I was learning was a challenge to me.... I also think second grade would've been too easy for me, and I would've been getting straight A's without work. But in third grade I had to work. That was the fun part." Work equating with fun — acceleration of this type encourages that type of thinking. However Michael did encounter some negatives. Since he was the first to grade skip, he met with some opposition from other children: "Well, I was teased by a lot of kids, and I had my feelings hurt quite a bit – but that was third grade. I don't think that kids know how cruel they can really be at that age." Eventually though this righted itself: "But now that I have known a lot of people for however many years, the age difference doesn't seem to matter anymore."

Grade acceleration certainly changes the lives of gifted young people. By concentrating on intellectual needs instead of age expectations, schools can better serve all children. Whether parent-initiated or school-requested, grade skipping allows continuous progress for the gifted and talented. And for some children, it is the most viable answer.



## On the Web

Visit *The Center for Gifted Studies'* web site at <http://www.wku.edu/gifted>. Please let us know what you want to see that you aren't seeing. After all, the site is to serve your needs.



*Thanks to all of you who took a few moments to let us catch up on your lives! In the last edition of The Challenge, we introduced our new feature: Alumni Update. Below follows pieces and snatches from lives of people you may very well know. Enjoy catching up!*

*Remember that you are important to us: you help make us what we are — and you give us reason for being. We'd love to hear from you. Simply drop an e-mail ([gifted@wku.edu](mailto:gifted@wku.edu)), fill out the electronic form on the web ([www.wku.edu/gifted](http://www.wku.edu/gifted) under Alumni), or mail in an update (The Center for Gifted Studies, 1 Big Red Way, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY, 42101.) We look forward to hearing from you.*

# alumni update

**Angela Walker Wilkins** (VAMPY 1985 and 1986) has been promoted to Staff Sergeant (E-6) in the Kentucky National Guard. She is a Program Analyst for the Deputy Chief of Staff of Information Management in Frankfort, KY.

**Leah Fuller Rogers** (SCATS 1987 and 1988) is teaching high school English in Lawrenceburg, KY, after earning her Master's degree in Secondary English Education.

**Amelia (Amy) Gordon** (VAMPY 1990 and 1992) is a forensic toxicologist for the Kentucky Central Crime Lab in Frankfort, KY. She was hired after completing her BS in Chemistry from Furman University in 1999.

**Kimberly Lorch** (VAMPY 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997) attends Emory University in Atlanta, GA. She is a Biology and Music Major (she plays the oboe) in a pre-med program.

**Sarah Lind** (VAMPY 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997) attends Vanderbilt University where she studies German and Philosophy. She is involved in Chamber Singers, College Democrats, and the Community Outreach Program. After undergraduate school, she hopes to go to law school.

**Karl Miller** (SCATS 1983) has just returned home to Western where he is Director of Development for the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. After working in Admissions and Development for Lindsey Wilson College for eight years, he and his family moved to Bowling Green in October of 2000.

**David Bauer** (VAMPY 1992, 1993; Travel to Italy, Russia, Europe, and England) began Medical School at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor this fall after researching Alzheimer's Disease at Johns Hopkins Medical Institution in 2000. He earned his B.A. in Neuroscience from Johns Hopkins in the fall of 1999. While there, he began the National Neuroscience Honor Society, was Arts Editor of the school newspaper, and worked as the Assistant Station Manager of WHSR (the campus radio station.)

**Ami Karlage** (VAMPY 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997) is concentrating in Biochemistry at Harvard. For fun she's learning to speak modern Irish-Gaelic. She also participates in the Society for Creative Anachronism.

**Sarah Brite Evans** (VAMPY 1989 and 1990) practices law in San Diego, CA, where she lives with her new husband. After VAMPY, she completed her high school degree while simultaneously beginning her college career as a resident scholar at University of Southern California. She attended law school at Notre Dame University graduating in 2000. Her email is [4sc+nd@mail.com](mailto:4sc+nd@mail.com) to get in touch.

*"VAMPY opened my eyes to academia and showed me there were others in the world who, like myself, were intelligent and loved to learn. My best friends from middle and high school came from VAMPY. My travel experiences have helped me to learn from and relate to the many international students I have become friends with here at Johns Hopkins."*

**DAVID BAUER**  
Madisonville, KY

*"One of the threads that ties my interests together is the importance of creating communities, which I discovered during my first summer at VAMPY. The arts are an ideal starting place when creating similarly close-knit communities outside the idyllic conditions on the campus of Western Kentucky University."*

**DUNCAN TEATER**  
Bloomington, IN

**Kristen VonGruben** (VAMPY 1993) graduated this August from Miami University in Ohio with a Bachelor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Studies with an undergraduate thesis in the Concept of the Memorial. She plans to graduate in December of 2000 from Truman State University in Missouri with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.

**Duncan Teater** (VAMPY 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996; counselor) has recently designed his own major, Performance Studies, at Indiana University. He is coupling this along with an English major. Last summer he worked at Anna Deavere Smith's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at Harvard University. The Institute workshops new works in an environment that supports civic dialogue including *New York Times'* columnist Margo Jefferson, Rwandan playwright Hope Azeda, and mime Bill Bowers.

**Justin Jones** (VAMPY 1990 and 1991) is Associate Editor of *Wizard: The Comics Magazine*, the number one fan magazine about the comics industry with a circulation of 250,000. He graduated cum laude from Harvard in 1997 with a degree in English and American Literature. Aside from his love of words, he has a passion for music that includes playing multiple instruments (he's played drum in a couple of semi-professional bands) and collecting (he just completed his search for all 37 Beach Boys albums and will begin listening to them in chronological order.)

**Drew Curtis** (VAMPY 1987 and 1988) is owner and president of DCR.net, a Frankfort-based internet service provider covering a ninety-mile radius. His company will soon celebrate its fifth year. Drew is married without children. He graduated from Luther College in 1995.

**Joe Hans** (SCATS 1993 and 1995; VAMPY 1996 and 1997) is currently studying Graphic Design at Western Kentucky University. He hopes to get in contact with friends from VAMPY.

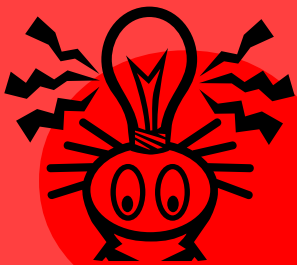
**Katie Bauer** (VAMPY 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998) is working toward a journalism degree at the University of Missouri in Columbia. She is involved in a campus Christian organization, a literacy tutoring program in local elementary schools, the Trombone Club, and the Society of Professional Journalists.

*"VAMPY helped me discover interests I might not have found otherwise. My love for the German language was fostered at VAMPY.... I also discovered a love for the study of religion and philosophy, something with which I had no experience before my Humanities class. I'm now majoring in German and Philosophy."*

**SARAH LIND**  
Nashville, TN

*"My experience at SCATS was invaluable. I still distinctly remember the friends and the fun. Now my nephew has joined in the action enjoying SCATS, VAMPY, and the travel activities."*

**LEAH FULLER ROGERS**  
Lawrenceburg, KY



## Ideas Needed for The Challenge

We want *The Challenge* to speak to you and for you. Please contact The Center with any ideas, articles, or suggestions. We'd also appreciate your prized pictures for possible inclusion. We want your help and insight. You can reach us by phone (270) 745-6323, by fax (270) 745-6279, or by e-mail at [gifted@wku.edu](mailto:gifted@wku.edu).

## Lost Contact

As the years have gone by, we have lost contact with some people important to us. Under Alumni on our web page ([www.wku.edu/gifted](http://www.wku.edu/gifted)), we have a section entitled: Where Are They Now? Check it out. If you can help us reconnect with some of these friends, we sure would appreciate it.



## ***Social Studies to Join Vertical Team Institutes***

How can we help students achieve world-class standards? How can we better prepare them for high-ability, challenging Advanced Placement classes? The answers lie in Vertical Team Training. The College Board's Southern Regional Office and The Center for Gifted Studies have offered this training for five years here at Western. Scores of districts from all over the southern region have sent teams to learn how to vertically align curriculum in both mathematics and English. School districts such as Fleming County in Kentucky wholeheartedly believe in this approach. In fact, since their initial training when the Institutes were first offered, they have devoted one day every other month for team collaboration and training updates.

Gifted and Talented Coordinator for Fleming County, Joy Gooding, stresses the critical impact the vertical team training has had in their school system. In fact, one of her goals each year is to find the money to fund their meetings wherein all math and all English teachers from grades 6-12 attend. She explained that usually 1/3 comes from the district, 1/3 from Gifted and Talented funds, and 1/3 from an



# teachers

outside source (such as Javits Grant money or other funds.) Each month the teachers rotate presenting an instructional activity to their colleagues. Teachers must take that and apply it to the level they teach. The updates strengthen their initial training and ensure high-level teaching.

The English and Mathematical Vertical Team Institutes have proven so successful that The College Board will be piloting one for social studies. The Social Studies Vertical Team Institute, under the leadership of Warren Hierl, will premier at Western in the summer of 2001. Warren, aside from being an AP consultant for us, helped in developing and writing the AP Social Studies Vertical Teams Guide. He has also field tested certain strategies contained in the guide in Tulsa, OK, and presented portions of the guide to an initial group of vertical team presenters in Denver, CO. According to Warren, "The guide emphasizes social studies as a process with the idea that reinforcement of that process, early and often, builds the analytical skill and the confidence necessary for students to enroll and succeed in higher level classes." This should also increase enrollment for the traditionally under-represented student populations.

He describes the philosophy behind vertical teams: "The vertical teams program envisions teams of teachers who

feed a particular Advanced Placement program coming together to familiarize themselves with the social studies thought process necessary for student success. Working together, middle school, pre-AP, and AP teachers can gain an appreciation for the level of development necessary for success in AP classes and develop a delivery plan designed to maximize both enrollment and achievement." This vision is certainly realized in Fleming County in the mathematics and English areas; that realization should transfer to social studies as well.

Warren Hierl's background points toward the program's success. Not only has he been an AP U.S. History teacher for 28 years in Winston-Salem, NC, but he has also been an AP reader and table leader for years. Throughout the southeast he's conducted more than 50 one-day AP workshops and more than 15 week-long workshops. His experience coupled with the philosophical foundations of vertical teaming combine for success.

The nearly sixty participants from last year's Institutes (including thirty-eight from Hamilton County, TN) concur on the success of the English and Mathematics Vertical Team training. They made such comments as "The Collaboration with our peers is invaluable" and "It provides a new perspec-



tive to instruction, affords practical ways to apply the instruction to my classes, and has given me the opportunity to share with colleagues." The Social Studies Vertical Team Institute should prove just as worthy.

### ***Mentoring: It Works!***

In the last edition of *The Challenge*, we reprinted an article devoted to mentoring and asked for your own mentoring experiences. Mentoring, remember, is when the student has a one-to-one relationship with someone who provides advanced training and experiences in a content area. We were well-pleased with the response. Although mentoring is certainly not prevalent in every district much less every school, some of you out there are pioneering the process, paving the way for others. What follows are a few very successful relationships:

**Christa Roessler**, a one-year SCATS veteran and a three-year VAMPY camper, experienced a rewarding mentoring relationship her eighth-grade year at Boyle County High School in Kentucky. Due to an open block in her schedule and her gifted and talented teacher's resourcefulness, Christa was paired with Glenn Decker, a physical therapist at Physical Therapy Clinic of Danville. Glenn wasn't a stranger to Christa; she had seen him several times due to injuries from the many sports she plays. She always thought that physical therapy "might be a fun job." She shadowed him weekly and at times even "helped the patients with their exercises." Although after the experience she has decided not to become a physical therapist, she definitely values the experience: "It opened my eyes to what goes on inside an office; it was definitely a positive experience."

Discovering what we don't want to pursue as a career is a vital step in choosing the right path.

VAMPY veteran **Thomas Johnston** of Stamping Ground, KY, has been homeschooled since third grade: "it could be suggested that my entire educational experience

with my parents has been akin to a mentoring experience." But the high-school sophomore had a more traditional mentoring relationship with a family friend, Georgetown College professor Dr. Homer White. Three years ago, Dr. White volunteered to teach Thomas Latin on a weekly basis: "Much of the tedious drill and practice aspects of learning a foreign language were done at home, and I could get help with specific problems during our weekly meetings." After a year, Dr. White felt that he would benefit from some formal instruction, so he arranged for Thomas to take classes at the University of Kentucky (Latin and Classics.) But that didn't end their mentoring relationship: "Our first mentoring project worked so well that last summer we began a new project. Dr. White is teaching me geometry using Euclid's Elements as our basic text. It is also working out very nicely!" In fact, Thomas only has one thing that he would change about their relationship: "I would only ask that I have more time to study with Dr. White!"

Dr. White concurs enthusiastically: "Working with Thomas was a great experience for me. For one thing it closed a circle with me." As a young man, Dr. White also had a mentor six years his senior, Robert Bass. From chess playing (at times even via phone) to philosophy, they shared passions, "so mentoring to Thomas was a very pleasant way of 'giving

***"Mentoring is more about relationships than expertise. Both members of the relationship are enriched by it."***

**DR. BARBARA GROSZ**  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL

***"There were times when things went wrong, and we wanted to throw our test tubes across the room, but we learned that science is problems and overcoming them is research"***

**JULIE CRUDELE**  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL

***"Gifted children have this consuming interest in certain ideas, but their peers aren't ready to take a similar interest in those ideas. Many adults in their lives (parents and teachers) might be able to take such an interest, but frequently they are more taken up with relating to the child 'as a child': that is, these adults are primarily concerned with the child's moral or social development, worrying whether he/she will be well-adjusted or will 'turn out' all right. Gifted kids want and need contact with people who are interested in their ideas for their own sake. Without it, they experience a unique – and very acute – kind of loneliness."***

**DR. HOMER WHITE**  
Georgetown, KY



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

back.” He describes how he and Thomas “sort of fell into the mentoring relationship” and believes that “maybe that’s the best way for mentoring to happen.” Mentoring, he believes, enriches both people: “The joy in mentoring is that it doesn’t feel at all like real work, though I did spend a fair amount of time dusting off old schoolboy Latin skills in preparation for meetings with Thomas. Gifted kids learn independently, usually acquire an interest in ideas for their own sake, and are nourished more by the mentor’s enthusiasm than by smoothness in the mentor’s teaching technique.” Yet he cautions would-be mentors: “The thing to avoid in mentoring is the urge to influence the youngster to follow all the paths that one would like to have taken but didn’t or couldn’t take, but be willing instead to follow along with his or her interests as they develop.”

One-on-one sharing of expertise in a field is the backbone of mentoring experiences such as Thomas’. Our last example also includes an adult willing to devote personal time to furthering the education of others.

AP Biology teacher at Pine Crest School, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Dr. Barbara Grosz has mentored people for the majority of her thirty-six years in the teaching profession. Whether it’s other AP Biology teachers through her consultant work for The College Board (including workshops here at Western) or her new teacher mentees at her own school, Dr. Grosz brings her knowledge and expertise to others. So her Biochemical Genetics summer course she designed for Biology I students was “a natural direction for a science teacher to take,” she explained. “I wanted to excite our younger students about research and show them that enthusiasm and diligence were the skills needed to be a successful researcher ... rather than the perceived ‘brilliance of mind.’” Eight students took the three-week, seven-hour a day class, including four-year alumna of VAMPY

**Julie Crudele.** The experience proved exemplary.

Julie describes the course itself: “In the first two weeks, my fellow classmates and I underwent a rigorous curriculum intended to instruct us on the purposes of genetic research, the science behind current discoveries, and the procedures used in experiments. For at least an hour every day we were lectured on a topic, whether it was DNA, RNA, PCR, primers, enzymes or anything else that went along with what we were doing in lab. The rest of the time was spent in the laboratory where we learned hands-on most of the important techniques for genetic research.” She continues: “After we completed the two weeks, just when we thought our brains might overload if given new information, our teacher cut us completely loose. She was no longer our teacher, just a mentor, and we were on our own! Each student was challenged to develop a question that could be answered — or at least begin to be answered — by the end of the week.”

“All eight learned many biotech skills and then used them to ‘complete’ a research project,” concurs Dr. Grosz. “They designed their experiments and collected their data independently. They all wrote research papers and presented their results at a symposium. At least three are sure to continue their work during the school year and to present at the Florida Junior Academy of Science.”



**“The surest way to make it difficult for children is to make it easy for them.”**

**— Eleanor Roosevelt**

Julie believes that all eight will continue research: “While none of us made a break-through discovery in those three weeks, all of us developed the skills and patience necessary to be able to move forward. New worlds have been opened to us all, and I hypothesize that next summer each and every one of us will be working on breakthrough information in a college lab. And when our mentor asks, ‘So do you know how to use a micropipet?’ our answers will be ‘Of course!’” Mentoring is just that — the sharing of expertise in content, in method, and in philosophy. Julie and her seven other mentees certainly benefitted.

One of the remarkable aspects of mentoring, though, is the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Yes, the mentees gain knowledge and confidence in a content area. But the mentors gain as well. Dr. Barbara Grosz perhaps summed it best: “Mentoring is more about relationships than expertise. Both members of the relationship are enriched by it.” Mentoring is an immeasurably valuable learning option for the gifted and talented.

## ***They Keep Coming Back***

Just as salmon return once a year to their birth place, Gene Pickel and Benita Albert of Oak Ridge, TN, return once a year to Western Kentucky University. Seventeen years ago The College Board, in conjunction with The Center, established the Advanced Placement Institute here for the Southern Region. Both Gene and Benita have consulted every single one of those years, each summer returning to train, guide, and encourage Advanced Placement teachers.

Why do they keep coming back? U.S. History consultant Gene Pickel explains: "The people with whom I work at Western are the most professional I know. They MAKE me do my best for them, and in the end I feel a sense of professional pride in what I have done. Also I like and respect all of the people there with whom I work, and some of them I love. I enjoy my peers, many of whom feel like brothers and sisters. By now, I look forward to seeing every one of them every year."

***"Over the years, both directly and indirectly, I have worked with hundreds of school systems and thousands of teachers. Everywhere I go, however, I meet teachers and administrators who are happy with mediocrity. 'The good student will always get by; we need to do all these special and wonderful things for students who have problems!' I have heard these words ten million times, and I am sick for the academic students. It seems to me that it is usually a handful of teachers in schools who work for the advancement of the academic, the intellectual students. At my school, it was teachers who designed courses and programs and fought for materials for these students. Thank God that the administrators got out of the way of the aggressive teacher. Here at Western Kentucky there is The Center with the purpose of teaching and challenging and looking after the needs of the advanced student. That is absolute proof there is a God looking after the world."***

**GENE PICKEL**

**U.S. History Consultant**

***"The Center for Gifted Studies enriches not only the professional lives of its teacher attendees, but it also renews and inspires my teaching soul. Working with other AP teacher consultants from across the AP disciplines has given me the opportunity to 'borrow' from the best teaching strategies and to have opportunities for broader academic discussions."***

**BENITA ALBERT**

**Calculus AB Consultant**

AP Calculus consultant Benita Albert shares her reasoning: "I love Kentucky Calculus teachers! Not to mention all the other wonderful teachers across the USA I have had the privilege of working with as they build/reinforce their high school Calculus programs. For many years I taught the only section of AP Calculus offered for teachers. As this group of alumni grew, the demands for a second year calculus institute (for experienced teachers) led The Center to offer such an opportunity. Thus, I now teach the experienced AP Calculus teachers group, a challenging and fun class. The teachers who have returned multiple times for my course say they do so because it's 'fun.' They keep me honest as they make sure I tell my 'stories' the same way each year."

Aside from their passion for their work and their seventeen-year connection with us, these two share other commonalities. Both have a long history with The College Board (Benita since 1975 and Gene since 1967;) they have served as AP consultants throughout the southeastern United States, AP test graders, and AP table leaders. In addition Benita and Gene have both been instrumental in the Building Success in Mathematics and Social Studies respectively. They even taught at the same high school, Oak Ridge, until Gene left to become a full-time consultant for The College Board. Now Gene busies himself with his System Consultant position for the Florida Initiative. They've devoted their lives to education of the gifted and those who teach the gifted.

This past summer, Gene and Benita instructed part of the 258 teachers who came to Bowling Green for one of sixteen beginning and experienced AP workshops. People came from thirteen states and two countries in order to learn how to better teach AP courses. As Benita puts it, she's here "to enrich the teaching experience of AP Calculus." Gene agrees: "How can I do more for good education? Work to make teachers good teachers." And they both succeed in these goals.

The Advanced Placement Institute is indeed a place of learning and sharing – but it is also a place of camaraderie and fun. Benita fondly remembers the at-home dinners at the Roberts' and "the consultants' crazy repartee." She also marvels at "Dick Roberts and his ability to move thousands of boxes of books and, of course, my requisite two or more chalkboards to any site where Calculus is being taught." Similarly, Gene reflects on one of his most remarkable memories: "During a terrible storm, the fire alarm went off in the middle of the night. I got up, calmly, dressed, calmly, got my money and new shoes, calmly, and cautiously opened the door to my room. When I looked out, I was horrified! Coming out of all the other rooms were my female friends, still in their bathrobes, and NO eye makeup. It was the most frightening experience of my life. Although I had known all these women for many years, I could not recognize a single one of them. Years have gone by now, but I still shudder at that memory."

This approach to learning, this sense of humor, this kindred-spirit-detector distinguish our AP Institutes from others. These factors help create an atmosphere that people willingly return to year after year after year. Just ask Gene or Benita.



## ***What Educators and Parents Need to Know About Elementary School Programs in Gifted Education***

### **Implications for School Planning What are the options?**

The most frequently used program arrangements nationwide are within-class programs, pull-out programs, separate classes, and special schools. Identification of students for any of these programs could range from the top 2-25% of a school's population.

Within-class Programs address the needs of high ability students who are in heterogeneously grouped classes 100% of the time. Students attend classes with their same-age peers. The percentage of high ability students in these classes may vary from 1% to 50% or more.

Pull-out Programs offer students services in a resource room format for a special amount of time per week. Many programs operate for a minimum of two hours each week.

In schools with heterogeneous populations, those in Separate Classes receive their instruction in homogeneous groups for all content-area courses.

### **Communication**

Clear and frequent communication is maintained between parents/guardians, teachers, students, and administrators regarding the program. This is accomplished through both general strategies (e.g., newsletters) and individual contacts (e.g., phone class or meetings.) These communications include commendations as well as recommendations about program activities and student performance.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Teachers are flexible in matching both curriculum and instruction to student needs. They employ a variety of instructional techniques to complement student characteristics, and students feel that they are appropriately challenged. For example, a match is sought between the pacing of the curriculum and the student's ability in a given subject.

### **Student Needs**

Academic staff and administrators are committed to serving students from traditionally underrepresented populations. They take assertive roles in selecting these students for their programs and focus on being sensitive to the needs of these students once they have entered the programs.

# parents

Students attending Separate Schools are grouped with peers of similar ability on a full-time basis in schools designed for the gifted and talented.

### **What key traits are consistent across exemplary models of all four program types?**

Differing communities will make different decisions regarding the best educational arrangements for gifted learners. Whatever decisions are made, however, effective programs for high ability students will share some common traits.

#### **Leadership**

In an exemplary model, there is a strong administrative voice to represent and implement the program for gifted learners. This individual oversees the development of long-term goals and objectives and communicates this information to everyone in the school and community. This leader ensures that staff and community members understand and support the program.

#### **Atmosphere and Environment**

An accepting atmosphere throughout the school promotes a positive attitude toward the program for the gifted and talented among students, parents, teachers, and administrators. In these programs, students are comfortable with their educational and social environments. Staff members are given the time, materials, and training to address the needs of gifted learners.

### **RESEARCH FACTS**

- Children in programs for the gifted obtain higher achievement scores than their gifted peers who are not in such programs.
- A successful program for the gifted does not necessarily depend on the type of programming arrangement. While one type of arrangement may be more beneficial for a particular child, it is the way the program is implemented that determined its impact.
- Parents are the least satisfied with programs for which they perceive there is little or no communication between the home and the school.
- Successful programs challenge students through high level content and pacing of the curriculum, while providing many opportunities for these students to make their own choices and to have control over their learning environment.
- Successful programs focus on the identification of underrepresented populations of students in their written policies and provide support for teachers to address their students' learning needs.
- District coordinators in successful programs invite parents to school events, distribute questionnaires about potential family interaction with the school, and keep parents informed about their child's educational program.

This information comes from a pamphlet published by NRC/GT: M. Delcourt (Ed.) (n.d.) What educators and parents need to know about elementary school programs in gifted education (Practitioners' Guide - A9508). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

Over two hundred people — including a bus load of young women from Russellville — were educated and inspired by Dr. Rimm's lecture on achieving women sponsored by The Mary E. Hensley Lecture Series. September 18, the author of *See Jane Win*, a New York Times Best Seller, described the main themes in the childhoods of successful women — these themes surfaced from her well-researched work that analyzed how over 1000 girls became successful women. Her motivational presentation also provided research-based advice for raising and teaching girls. And her question and answer session allowed for personal involvement.

Dr. Rimm currently directs The Family Achievement Center in Ohio and is a clinical professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Specializing in the gifted student, she has authored a dozen books including *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades — And What You Can Do About It* and *Keys to Parenting the Gifted Child*. She also hosts a weekly national call-in program on public radio, writes a syndicated newspaper column, and appears regularly on television including NBC-TV's *Today*.

On September 19, she presented an *Underachievement Workshop* to 60

educators, parents, and administrators. Here she outlined the tell-tale signs of underachievement in the gifted and gave realistic solutions to stop that all-too-common problem. One part of the answer dealt with the perspective of the learner: "Winning builds confidence; losing builds character," she explained. Her *Trifocal*



*Method for Curing the Underachievement Syndrome*, used by schools and families across the nation, effectively combines the efforts of the child, school, and home to make the child an achiever. (See her article: "An Underachievement Epidemic")

According to Dr. Rimm, it is critical that we quit sending the message to gifted young people that there is little relationship between efforts and outcome. To most of these children, she argues, the message is smart equates with easy and success equates with magic. That's not the case at all. In reality, she explains, "If you are successful, you have lost many times."

It is messages like that one — and the ones concerning the dire need to help our girls be successful — that Sylvia Rimm stresses in her voice that reaches the nation. Her deep interest in and passion for the young gifted truly make a difference.

## Noted Psychologist Dr. Sylvia Rimm Comes to Western

### EXCERPTS FROM "AN UNDERACHIEVEMENT EPIDEMIC" BY DR. SYLVIA RIMM

I was determined that no February blizzard would prevent me from my first opportunity to talk about underachievement on national television. Travel from the Midwest to New York tested my own resolve to achieve success — but I struggled through the snow. Finally, in a five-minute segment on NBC's *Today* show, I described the epidemic problem of underachievement. After the show, I received more than 20,000 calls and 5,000 letters — confirming to me the existence of an underachievement epidemic....

#### DEFINITION OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT

...Here is the definition I prefer to use:

Underachievement is a discrepancy between a child's school performance and some index of the child's ability. If children are not working to their ability in school, they are underachieving.

True underachievement problems are a matter of degree. Students who occasionally miss an assignment or

don't study as hard as they probably should hardly ever cause anyone much grief. The underachievers who sit in the U.S. classrooms and come to my clinic are capable of As and Bs but have report cards that often show Ds and Fs. What work they have turned in is usually sloppy or incomplete; or they might complete it and then forget it or lose it. Some underachievers battle their teachers and openly refuse to do their work. They often blame others for their problems: teachers, brothers, sisters, mother or father, and sometimes even the dog.

Underlying the excuses are two main issues: Underachievers don't have internal locus of control, nor do they function well in competition. The lack of internal locus of control translates to a missed connection between effort and outcome: underachievers haven't learned about hard work. Underachieving students are often magical in their thinking: they expect to be anointed to fame and fortune.... They just don't know how to be productively smart.

If they put forth effort, they no longer have an excuse to protect their fragile self-concepts. They've defined smart as "easy," and anything that is difficult threatens their sense of well-being.

The competition problem is less obvious because underachievers often declare that they are good sports. It is their behavior that tells you that losing experiences make them feel like losers. They avoid any risk of losing and choose only activities or interests at which they are unique or best; but when they hit the proverbial "wall," they quit, dropout, or choose something else.

#### CAUSES OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT

There are home and school causes of underachievement — usually occurring in combination. Overempowerment and "adultization" can be important causes, especially for first and only children, children in single-parent households, or children of difficult divorces. Gifted children are also at risk of being given too much power too soon. Early health problems can also be a risk factor.

Lack of challenge or too much challenge in the classroom can cause problems as can the overcompetitive or undercompetitive classroom. Children may say they are bored at school, but the term "boring" may also mask feelings of inadequacy.

Pressures that children internalize can also initiate problems. Sometimes those pressures stem from uneven abilities. Extreme praise by parents or teachers can also cause children to believe that adults expect more of them than they can produce.... Perfectionism can cause impossible feelings of pressure. Peer relationships can even cause pressures not to achieve. Informal labeling of the children within the family such as "the smart one," "the jock," "the creative one," or "the social one," can cause competitive pressures.

#### DIRECTIONS OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT: DEPENDENCE AND DOMINANCE

...Children should be encouraged to develop independence and creativity. It is only the extremes that lead to dependency and dominance. When children complain, whine, or are continually negative, or when they request help more frequently than they need it, they're showing symptoms of too-dependent relationships. If they are creative only for the purpose of opposing, or if they insist on wielding power without respect to the rights of others, they are too dominant. These extremes will result in underachievement at some level.

Thus underachievement is a collection of symptoms, and underachieving children will cause other family and relationship problems. Underachievement can be reversed, and parents and teachers can help children modify their own expectations and develop confidence to live more satisfying, resilient, and productive lives.

#### REVERSING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

At the Family Achievement Clinic, we reverse underachievement in roughly four out of five children by using a three-pronged approach called the *Trifocal Model*, which

focuses on the child, the parents, and the school.

The Trifocal Model includes six steps. Assessment is the first important step, leading to communication with parent and child, identification of the child's profile, and changing parent and teacher expectations. The final step presents home and school modifications and strategies for both dependent and dominant children. In the clinic setting, the average reversal time for underachievement ranges from six months to a year, depending mostly on the patience and perseverance of the parents and teachers (for step-by-step instructions in using the Trifocal Model, see Rimm 1995....)

The Model includes practical strategies for parents and teachers. Some strategies for teachers include teaching to multiple learning styles; teaching students about challenge, competition, cooperation, and the acceptance of criticism; ... teaching concentration techniques; learning anti-arguing routines; and giving children an audience....

Examples of home strategies include building study routines, bedtime and morning independence routines, organizational and attention techniques, and perhaps most important, united parenting and respect and support for schools and teachers. Twelve guidelines for parents are included in Rimm's Laws of student achievement (Rimm 1995).... Here are a few:

- Overreaction by parents to children's successes and failures leads them to feel either intense pressure to succeed or despair and discouragement on dealing with failure.
- Children can learn appropriate behaviors more easily if they have an effective model to imitate.
- Deprivation and excess frequently exhibit the same symptoms.
- Children feel more tension when they are worrying about their work than when they are doing their work.
- Children develop self-confidence through struggle.

#### HIGH EXPECTATIONS, PARENT SUPPORT, AND A WORK ETHIC

Although there is no simple answer to the complicated question of underachievement, we can use the Trifocal Model as a framework for some principles that we know underlie good learning. If parents have realistically high expectations, if they respect teachers and teachers respect them, and if children can be taught a healthy work ethic, despite the multiple problems in our society, resilience and achievement can be taught. As parents and educators, we must accept our leadership responsibilities. If we can build children's confidence and competencies, we can empower them gradually as they grow in maturity and wisdom.

---

Rimm, S.B. (1995). *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades and What You Can Do About It*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Rimm, S.B. (1996) *Dr. Sylvia Rimm's Smart Parenting: How to Raise a Happy Achieving Child*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. Article excerpts reprinted with permission from

Rimm, S.B. (1997) "An Underachievement Epidemic" in *Educational Leadership* April 1997: 18-22.



## WELCOME HOME

The Center for Gifted Studies welcomes 1983 SCATS veteran Karl Miller home. Karl has recently been named the Director of Development for the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences here at Western Kentucky University. He will be instrumental in helping us reach our vision financially. And we are so fortunate that he personally shares this vision with us.



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

Karl attended the first-ever Summer Camp. He reflects, "I am so proud of having been involved, been part of the program. It opened my eyes." This direct involvement has created ownership and motivation: "I am very aware of the fine work The Center does. One reason I enjoy fundraising is that I have such a worthwhile cause to do it for. That keeps me motivated."

Not only does Karl have a strong history with us (one that includes his brother Mark's involvement in SCATS in 1985 and 1986), but he also has a rich history with Western itself. Karl graduated from Western in 1991 as a Public Relations major and a Spanish minor. While here, he served as a Spirit Master as well as the Vice President for Public Relations in Student Government. He earned his MBA from Western the summer of this year. Even his wife is an alumna! (And possibly future Hilltopper plans have been made already for his toddler.)

His eight-year history in the Admissions (including the Director's position) and Development Offices at Lindsey Wilson College afforded Karl a strong foundation. This Breckinridge County native not only understands the nuances of development, but understands and believes in the cause of the gifted child. We are excited to have him on our team.

## Friends Wishing to Contact Us

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*"I look forward to getting out and meeting folks that we hope will support what we're doing."*

**KARL MILLER**

*Director of Development*

# friends of the center

The following people are not only sharing our vision, but they are also helping us reach that vision. Through their kind donations and gifts, The Center can continue servicing the needs of the gifted and talented student, their educators, and their parents.

Robert and Barbara Begtrup	Nashville, TN	William and Juliana Howard	Valdosta, GA
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## The Calendar of Events

**January 27, February 3,  
10, 17, and 24, 2001**

Super Saturdays, WKU

**April 6 - 15, 2001**

Spring Break in Paris

**May 25, 2001**

TIP's Kentucky Recognition Ceremony, WKU

**June 1 - 14, 2001**

The British Experience

**June 17 - 29, 2001**

The Summer Camp for Academically Talented  
Middle School Students (SCATS), WKU

**June 24 - 29, 2001**

The Advanced Placement Institute, WKU

**July 1 - 21, 2001**

The Summer Program for Verbally and  
Mathematically Precocious Youth (VAMPY),  
WKU

**July 9 - 13, 2001**

The English Vertical Team Institute, WKU

**July 9 - 13, 2001**

The Mathematics Vertical Team Institute,  
WKU

**July 9 - 13, 2001**

The Social Studies Vertical Team Institute,  
WKU

**November 29 - 30, 2001**

Leadership VI, WKU South Campus



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

## Anything New?

You're important to us! Help us be able to contact you. Please let us know of any changes:

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